

The Tagdilt Track, Morocco:

a site guide for the visitor

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Résumé: La Piste de Tagdilt est un site ornithologique d'accès facile, situé près de la route principale P32 à Boumaine-du-Dadès, dans le sud marocain. Le site comprend une plaine rocailleuse aride, située entre le Haut Atlas et le Jbel Sarhro et riche en oiseaux tels que Outardes houbara, gangas (quatre espèces), alouettes (13 espèces) et traquets (six espèces). Les conditions d'accès et d'hébergement sont décrites. Les visiteurs sont priés de consigner leurs observations ornithologiques dans le registre se trouvant à l'Auberge du Soleil Bleu et de les soumettre au Groupe d'Ornithologie du Maroc Centrale pour publication dans le rapport annuel sur les oiseaux marocains.

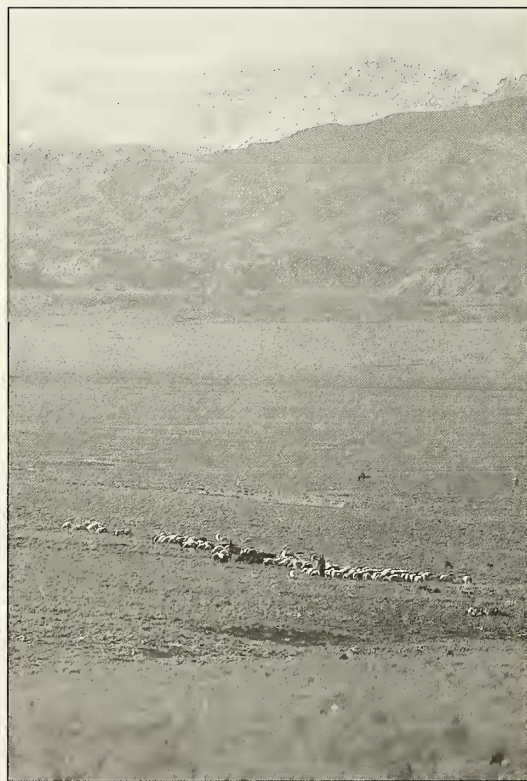
Morocco is now widely recognised as an exceptionally important country for birds, and for birders it offers many attractions. It has a rich and accessible desert avifauna. It holds a number of species with fragmented global distributions, such as Crimson-winged Finch^{*} and Thick-billed Lark. Equally, it has a number of species which, although widespread elsewhere in Africa, have only small and fascinating relict populations north of the Sahara Desert like the Dark Chanting Goshawk *Melierax metabates*. Last but not least of its allure is the presence of two critically endangered birds - Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* and Bald Ibis - Morocco holding all of the former's known wintering, and most of the latter's breeding population.

The best site for the curlews is the lagoon of Merja Zerga, on the Atlantic coast in the north-west, where two or three birds have been present from early November until February in recent years, attracting most visitors in December and January. There is also a smaller second peak in birding activity in March-April when those who want to see the ibis can combine this with the excitement of searching for spring migrants.

Whatever the date, however, almost everyone tries to make some time to get into the dry stone plains of the Atlas and perhaps beyond to the deserts that lead in to the Sahara. Although the birding is often hard work in these barren habitats, it can be the most rewarding too. The images of larks, wheatears, sandgrouse and, for a lucky few, Houbaras left in the mind, notebook or camera are, for many people, amongst the most profound of Morocco.

Although birding is not yet a widespread pastime amongst local people in Morocco there are now two keen groups dedicated to ornithology; Groupe

d'Ornithologie du Maroc Centrale (GOMaC) based in Méknes and Groupe de Recherche pour la Protection des Oiseaux au Maroc (GREPOM) in Rabat (see Appendix 1). Since there are as yet no local birders south of the Atlas all bird records have been produced by visitors to the region.



A view north-west from the foot of the Jbel Sahro looking back along the Tagdilt Track towards the High Atlas.

(Chris Bowden)

La Piste Tagdilt vue du nord-ouest du pied du Jbel Sarhro, avec le Haut Atlas en arrière-plan (Chris Bowden)

^{*} Scientific names are only given in the text where the species is not mentioned in Appendix 2.

The premier site for stone-plain birds - and birders - is the Tagdilt Track. As its name suggests this is a rough, rather anonymous-looking *piste*, which leaves the main P32 Ouzazarte to Er-Rachidia road on the eastern outskirts of Boulmane du Dades and weaves southwards across an open plain to end in the village of Tagdilt (Figure 1). A series of tracks has been created over the years as the traffic has increased, and these now form a network of routes particularly in the northern parts of the site.

At first glance the area looks to most people like any other patch of dry stone plain but on examining the map one finds it is the highest (all above the 1500 m contour) and most extensive flat area in the region. To reach the village of Tagdilt the tracks lead you across the high watershed which separates two of southern Morocco's greatest river basins, the Draa and the Ziz. The flats which form the site are bounded by bluffs which drop away abruptly to the west and east, and are

Access is from Boulmane du Dades, which lies on the northern edge of the site. This small Berber town sits at the mouth of the picturesque, if slightly eerie, Dades Gorge and offers a range of facilities to visitors including several hotels and a daily market. It is worth noting that Bergier and Bergier¹ describe birding around the town of Boulemane: this is a different place entirely being further north and east in the Middle Atlas region.

Most would-be 'Tagdilt Trackers' choose to stay on the eastern edge of the town at the Auberge du Soleil Bleu where there are very friendly management and an informative birders' logbook. For the purposes of this article I extracted the last five years' notes from the logbook and have summarised these below where possible. There are entries for 77 dates during the period 1989-93, ranging from 11 in 1989, to 19 entries

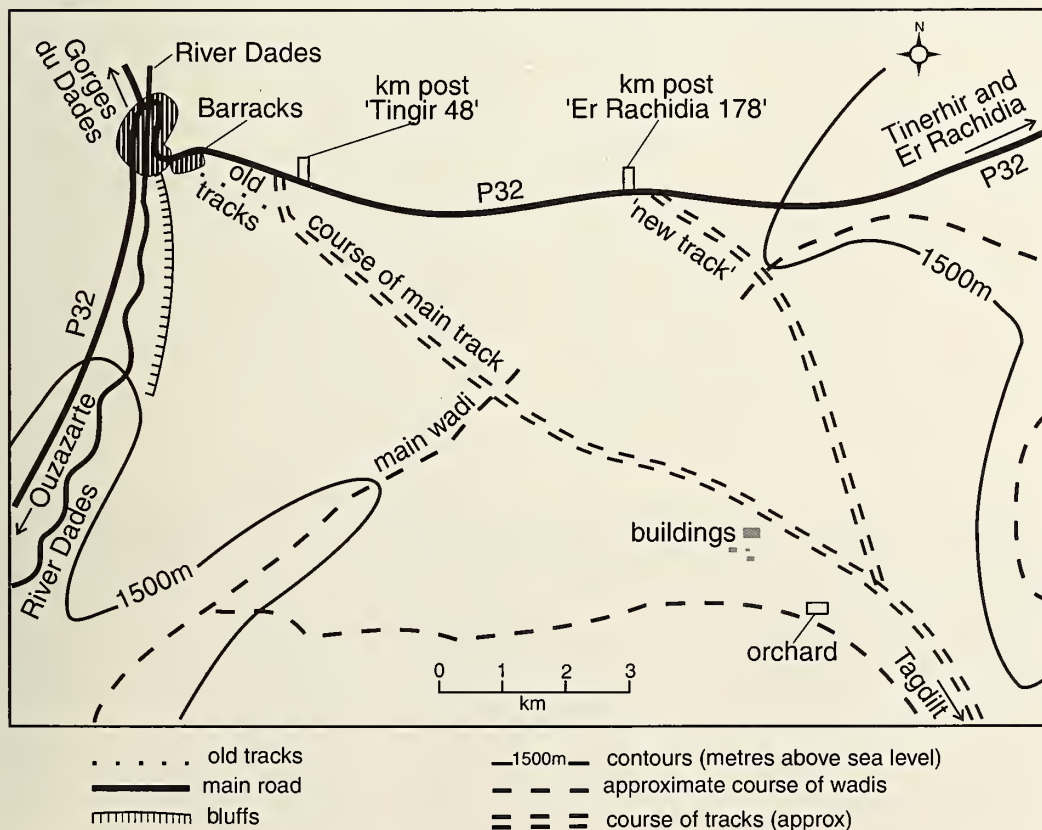


Figure 1. La Piste Tagdilt et les localités mentionnées dans le texte.

in 1993 - a reflection of the site's increasing popularity. The 55 species recorded in the logbook are listed in Appendix 2. I have tried to cover as many of the key species as possible in detail below.

A day on the Tagdilt Track

Many birders arrive towards the end of the day and make a trek across the plain in the last few quiet hours of daylight, then start again at dawn for a long morning on the various tracks. It can be a very frustrating place at first, not least because the range of existing site information can seem conflicting and is of variable accuracy (with the notable exception of Gosney²). Also the birds fluctuate in numbers and observability depending on the season, local weather conditions and, in particular, the snow cover at higher altitudes. Worryingly, there is also evidence of longer term declines in some species.

A good strategy is to check-in at the Auberge - and buy a coffee - and take a look in the logbook first to see what has been seen most recently before thinking through what you would most like to see and where it will most likely be. The following notes are at best a guide. Part of the excitement of the Tagdilt Track is that you never quite know what you might see, and very few birds are guaranteed. It is up to you to think on your feet and so make the most enjoyable use of your time.

It is best to stay mostly in your car when birding on the tracks, creeping along whilst searching the fifty or so metres of bare stones immediately adjacent to the roads. The ground birds are often extremely tame and will sit oblivious as the car passes within a few metres so look very carefully. Keep casting an eye to the horizon too for raptors and fast moving flocks of sandgrouse. It is worthwhile stopping every 500m or so, switching off the engine, getting out of the car and listening. Hard. Move a few paces away from the pops and twangs of the cooling car and give your ears at least a couple of minutes to acclimatise to the silence before moving on.

If you are making a very early start then try the eastern track - the New Track as it is sometimes called - as the aspect is slightly better for the morning light here: it is less busy than the main track too. You quickly find that there are many *pistes* heading across the plain which repeatedly split and join but all ultimately head in the same direction so getting lost is quite an achievement.

Heading down the New Track you may come upon the odd pair of Thick-billed or Temminck's Horned Larks within the first kilometre or so and you should see Red-rumped Wheatear pretty swiftly too. In early spring the flatter ridge tops, particularly to the west of the road, might hold a displaying male Houbara, if you are on site

in the first two hours of light - and are very lucky. They tend to move down into the bottom of the wadis to feed later in the morning. To the east of the track the ground drops away rapidly and there are sometimes small springs along this bluff, which can be good places for drinking sandgrouse, particularly Crowned. They often flight along the wadis a couple of hours after dawn. As you follow the track further the ground rises and flattens slightly - look for Hoopoe Larks and Cream-coloured Coursers sprinting off across the stones. At first glance the former is surprisingly similar to the latter. The track then gently curves westwards heading towards the distant line of telegraph poles. Stop and scan every post for raptors: Long-legged Buzzards are fond of sitting on top and Lanners are often posted on the look out for rodents too.

After another few kilometres you reach the main track. It is best to turn sharp right here and head back across the plain towards Boulmane. After a couple of kilometres you will see a small building on the western side. Pick your way through the network of tracks which lead to it (another good area for Hoopoe Lark and coursers) and from just beyond the building stop and scan the cultivated area below. This is an excellent area for sandgrouse either around the cultivation or, more often, feeding in the areas of bright new scrubby growth along the shoulder of the ridge. Flocks of Short-toed or Lesser Short-toed Larks are good indicators of where the food is. Sandgrouse and even Houbara can surprise you very close to the car as you creep along. Trumpeter Finches are often found around the small well and the buildings in the cultivated area. From here head back to Boulmane keeping one eye on the telegraph posts on your right and the other open for Thick-billed Lark as you pass through the series of wadis. You may wish to take a walk along one of the dry water courses and this offers the best, though slim, chance of finding Desert Eagle Owl; they seem to roost during the day along the sides of the wadis. In the final approach to the town you pass the old rubbish dump - uncovered and now, sadly, the source of thousands of plastic bags strewn across the plain by the wind. Both Raven and Brown-necked Raven have been seen here and sometimes hundreds of Choughs feed amongst the rubbish. The Auberge is only a few minutes drive from here with hot water to wash off the dust and lots of coffee.

Some birds can be difficult on the Tagdilt Track and you may wish to return to the field later in the day. The heat and the haze can make birding difficult after late morning so it might be better at this time to visit the Dades Gorge or, better still, the spectacular Todra Gorge and return in the late afternoon. The Todra

Gorge lies 53 km to the east and whilst birds are few - an occasional Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* and Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraetus fasciatus* - the far end of the gorge offers a quiet lunch spot with breathtaking views. The camp site is a good place to see Scops Owl *Otus scops* if you stay overnight.

Key birds

Most, if not all, birders who visit southern Morocco hope to see Houbara and the Tagdilt Track was once a site where this bird was almost guaranteed. But, as a result of intense persecution, it has declined in numbers and is now very difficult to find. With reported sightings on only 15 dates in the last five years the Tagdilt area now offers only a slim chance of success. The records suggest two peak times, the first from October into early winter when groups, sometimes as many as 12 birds, move into and through the Dades and Ziz valleys, perhaps from breeding areas south and east in Algeria. A second peak occurs in March when a few breeding birds arrive. Males can be found displaying on the flat tops between the wadis in the early morning, running blind into bushes and rocks in a ridiculous fashion. These displaying birds probably offer the best chance of seeing this species - two males were present in mid March 1994. We can only hope that the North African population of Houbaras can take the relentless pounding of the traditional, but now well equipped, hunters from the Gulf.

Cream-coloured Courser is another bird most easily seen in early spring when migrant birds arrive in good numbers. They can occur almost anywhere at this time, even on the verge outside the Auberge, but they tend to prefer the flatter, sandier areas on the southern side of the plain.

Long-legged Buzzard and Lanner are very regular at the site and can increase dramatically in numbers when rodent populations are high. Desert Eagle Owl is

probably resident but in small numbers. This bird ought to be easiest to find when calling at night although this has yet to be reported. Maybe no-one has looked.

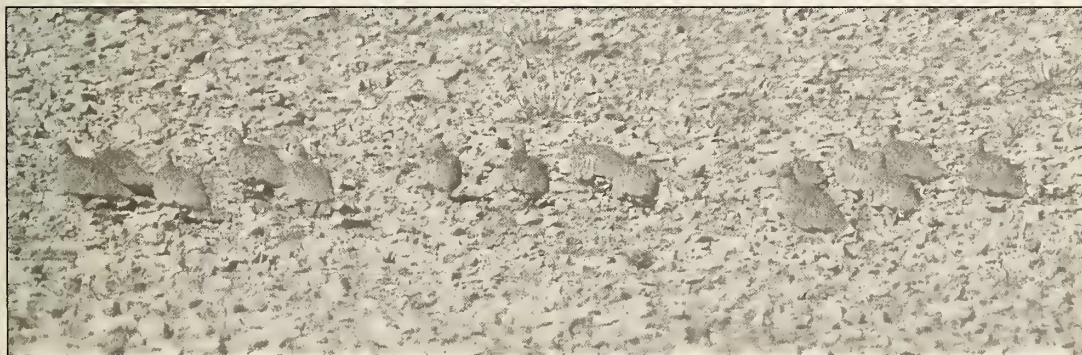
Sandgrouse

Four species of sandgrouse have been recorded in the area but the logbook shows that only one lucky group has seen them all in one visit. These birds are all nomadic and the best indication of what to expect is what was seen last week. Sandgrouse tend to move around during the first two hours after dawn and last hour before dusk in their search for water, but this resource is rather unpredictable. The cultivated area often has water pumped up from the well and sandgrouse have been seen drinking here. They often settle to feed on the sides of ridges, particularly adjacent to the cultivated area where they can be approached by staying in the car and creeping up in first gear.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse was noted in 58 of the 77 log book entries, with sometimes hundreds on winter days but usually smaller numbers during the breeding season. Scan the horizon for groups of 50 birds or more, which often climb rapidly when flushed to fly high and fast. The repeated *purrrrrr* call is far carrying and distinctive.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse is an erratic and strictly winter visitor but can be found in flocks of up to a few tens of birds. It flies like Black-bellied but the *gark* call is not far-carrying.

Crowned is often the most sought after of the site's sandgrouse, but can be tricky. It is resident though nomadic and rarely seen in groups of more than 30 birds here. Groups are extremely vocal both in flight and when settled giving a chicken-like guttural chattering *pk-puk-pukerr* - once heard never forgotten. They can move around the site fast and low and be extremely difficult to see in flight, often staying within the track of the wadis and below the horizon. A calling bird once



Groups of sandgrouse - these are Crowned *Pterocles coronatus* - will sit motionless as the car passes, so look hard. (Chris Bowden)
Des groupes de gangas - dans le cas ci-dessus, des Gangas couronnés Pterocles coronatus - restent immobiles lors du passage de la voiture, donc cherchez bien. (Chris Bowden)



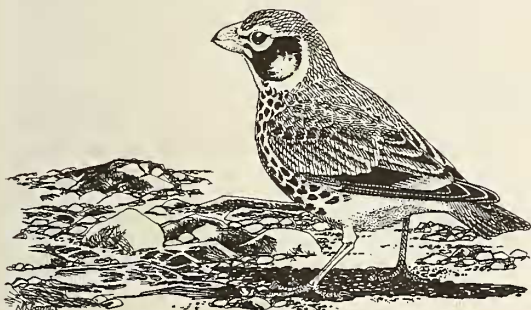
Crowned Sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus*, Israel, April 1990 (Dave Cottridge)
Ganga couronné *Pterocles coronatus*, Israel, avril 1990 (Dave Cottridge)



Temminck's Horned Lark, *Eremophila bilopha*, Israel, April 1989 (Dave Cottridge)
Alouette bilophe, *Eremophila bilopha*, Israel, avril 1989 (Dave Cottridge)

flew so close past me that I could hear its wing beats yet I saw nothing.

Spotted Sandgrouse has only been recorded five times in as many years but it is worth bearing the identification features in mind and looking hard at all flocks just in case.



Thick-billed Lark *Rhombocoris clotbey*
By Nik Borrow courtesy of Birdquest Ltd

Larks

Thirteen species of lark are noted in the log book of which the two most sought after species, the bullish looking Thick-billed Lark and the clean-lined Temminck's Horned Lark, are the most frequently recorded. Unsurprisingly, the rarest is Dupont's Lark which could be present in reasonable numbers but as yet no-one has put in the effort to look and listen for this bird at dawn when it should be most vocal.

In winter and early spring flocks of hundreds, occasionally thousands, of Short-toed and Lesser Short-toed Larks move into the area. From November to early February these are dominated by Lesser Short-toeds but there are normally a few Short-toeds too. These winter flocks are a good place to look for other odd larks - Desert or Bar-tailed Desert Larks will often be amongst the bustle and some of the rarer larks at the site, Calandra, Skylark and Shore Larks, have also been found amongst the bustle. From mid-February onwards Short-toed Larks move into and through the area in numbers. The huge flocks in March and April are a fine sight and sound for many of the birds practise their song flight, often swarming and chasing above what seems a moving carpet of birds. Suddenly, in May, they are gone leaving only the few resident birds.

Temminck's Horned Lark is resident and moderately common in the area. Out of 77 entries in the log book 67 mention this little gem, but most birders only find 20-30 birds in a morning on the track. From December to February loose wandering flocks of 30-40 birds can form and can be met anywhere on the site,

even next to the main road, but more normally pairs or groups of about five are found *tweeting* to one another on the flatter southern parts of the track.

Thick-billed Lark is an enigma. It seems to be resident but at a very low density - so anyone who puts in the effort will find this little hulk eventually, but it can take a long time (it took me three days). They tend to be in pairs or very small groups ambling nimbly from bush to bush without a sound. If disturbed they rocket off - look out for the ash grey underwings - often flying a long distance before frustratingly settling out of sight. The entries in the log book show 62 records out of 77 mornings in the field, suggesting it to be a pretty common bird. In 1989, 90 and 91 Thick-billed Larks were found in big winter flocks, sometimes thousands, more often hundreds of birds. However, in the last couple of years these groups have not formed - most of the negative records have been recent, December and January being the most barren times. Whether or not this is a true decline in numbers in the Tagdilt area - maybe numbers naturally vary from year to year depending on local conditions - we do not know, but birders' records are the only information we have to go on, so please put your records in the book.

Hoopoe Lark is resident on the flatter, more sandy areas on the southern side of the site. Parties of up to a dozen or more can form during the winter but from February pairs establish territories. Listen for its haunting whistle on the breeze and track it down by sighting the parachute display and the distinctive wing pattern from which the species largely takes its name.

Wheatears

Red-rumped Wheatear is found on the Tagdilt Track throughout the year, normally in pairs or family groups. Fairly common, big, fat and obvious, perching up on rocks, bushes, power-lines, on anything really, it is one of the real birding treats of the area. It is absent from the roadside areas further west in the Dades valley so this is a key site for birders who are not planning to visit the high plateaux further east.

By mid-March the plain is alive with migrant Desert Wheatears and it is now that other occasional wheatears - Common, Mourning, White-crowned Black and once Isabelline - are mostly found. Surprisingly, Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica*, quite common further west around Ouzazarte, has not been noted here. A few Desert Wheatears stay around the area through the autumn and winter but this bird is more likely to be found further south at this time.

Other species

Trumpeter Finch is most common in autumn when it can be found in compact little flocks almost anywhere

on the plains. Try looking along the sides of the wadis or around cultivated areas. A few birds are seen throughout the winter, but by March you are better off looking at higher altitudes. Try along the roadside in the rocky passes between Ouzazarte and Talouine. Immediately after heavy snow at higher altitudes small numbers of Crimson-winged Finches have been seen on the Tagdilt Track. A good indicator of the right conditions is the presence of Shore Lark in the area; they tend to move down onto the plains in hard weather too.

There have been a range of local rarities seen on the track over the years, including Golden and Tawny Eagles, Barbary and Peregrine Falcons, Egyptian Vulture, Dotterel and perhaps most interesting a single Bald Ibis in 1991. African Wild Cat *Felis silvestris*, Golden Jackal *Canis aureus* and Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* are all seen fairly regularly on the track too.

How to get there and where to stay

Boulmane du Dades lies on the main P32 Ouzazarte to Er-Rachidia road. The roads are well paved in both directions so it takes, at most, a couple of hours to cover the 116 km from Ouzazarte (without wheatear stops) and you should allow five hours for the 200 km trip from Erfoud.

Security can be a problem. Bear in mind that all along this route there is nothing between you and Algeria, except a disputed border, so police road blocks are a possibility. Be cautious and polite! Gendarmes may take an interest in your optical equipment, but most have seen birders before and will politely wave you on once they are sure of your identity. Bear in mind that a couple of checkpoints can add substantially to your journey time.

Boulmane du Dades has a number of two- and three-star hotels, but the Auberge de Soleil Bleu is the place to stay for birders. It is very reasonably priced with good food, clean rooms and stacks of hot water - the latter a rarity in Morocco in winter (you may have to ask for the hot water pump to be switched on). As in most Moroccan hotels there is a tendency not to use the heating so the temperature in the rooms varies between cold and freezing. I would advise a sleeping bag as a standard item of winter kit anywhere in Morocco and you will need it here.

The Auberge lies back from the road on the eastern side of Boulmane. Coming from the west one follows the P32 along the valley side and crosses the Dades river at the head of the gorge. From here the road climbs up the side of the valley, overlooking the market square, and bends to the left. Within a few hundred metres a petrol station comes into view on the left and you should turn left immediately before it. Coming from the east you take this side road as a corresponding right

turn, which you meet almost immediately you reach the outskirts of the town, just after the army buildings on the left and the petrol station on the right. Follow the metal road up the hill and pick up the signs for the Auberge (offering the 'Panorama' - a view) which lead you off to the right onto a stone road for the last few hundred metres. If you arrive late at night then the gates will be shut, but it is easy to unbolt these and find a warm welcome inside.

Records

Please take the time to call in at the Auberge as it is vitally important to add your observations to the book. The more detail the better. Notes on the exact time of day and weather conditions (how much snow is visible on the Atlas?) would be most useful. A copy of your trip report should be sent to Groupe d'Ornithologie du Maroc Centrale who publish an annual Moroccan bird report in their excellent journal *Porphyrio*.

The new and rapidly growing Moroccan conservation organisation Comité des Programmes pour la Conservation de la Nature (CPCN) will be undertaking a review of all the key sites for bird conservation in Morocco as a part of the BirdLife International *Important Bird Areas* (IBA) programme in 1995. It is very likely that the site we know as the Tagdilt Track will be selected as an IBA. Thus the birding information casually noted in the log book at the Auberge will be used as an important body of evidence to establish the potential global importance of this site for birds. Without the provision of sound data to national conservation organisations, such as CPCN, many of the sites we visit and enjoy birding at will be lost. Your information could not be more important.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to everyone who noted their observations in the logbook at the Auberge du Soleil Bleu - I thank those who will do so in advance. Dave Gosney did much of the record collation from the book. Sally Wilson and my Dad, Bob Allport, deserve full credit for suffering hours on rough roads in a Renault 4 in the name of research for this article (amongst other things). Chris Bowden, Mark Cocker, John Fanshawe, Lincoln Fishpool and Richard Webb kindly commented upon an earlier draft of the article. ☺

References

1. Bergier, P. and Bergier, F. 1990. *A Birdwatcher's Guide to Morocco*. Huntingdon: Prion Ltd.
2. Gosney, D. 1993. *Birding in Southern Morocco*. Sheffield: Gostours.

c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road Cambridge, CB3 0NA, UK.

Appendix 1:

Ornithological organisations in Morocco

- Comité des Programmes pour la Conservation de la Nature (CPCN), 41 Lot Zohra, El Harhoura, Temara, Morocco.
- Groupe d'Ornithologie du Maroc Centrale (GOMaC): Département de Biologie, Faculté des Sciences de Méknès, BP 4010 Beni-M-hamed, 5003 Méknès, Morocco.
- Groupe de Recherche pour la Protection des Oiseaux au Maroc (GREPOM): 12 rue Ottawa, Quartier Océan, 10,000 Rabat, Morocco.

Appendix 2:

Birds species noted in the birders' logbook at the Auberge du Soleil Bleu 1989-93

Bald Ibis	<i>Geronticus eremita</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circus gallicus</i>
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>

Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Tawny Eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>
Golden Eagle	<i>A. chrysaetos</i>
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Lanner	<i>F. biarmicus</i>
Peregrine	<i>F. peregrinus</i>
Barbary Falcon	<i>F. pelegrinoides</i>
Houbara	<i>Chlamydotis undulata</i>
Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>
Cream-coloured Courser	<i>Cursorius cursor</i>
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>
Dotterel	<i>Charadrius morinellus</i>
Crowned Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles coronatus</i>
Spotted Sandgrouse	<i>P. senegallus</i>
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>P. orientalis</i>
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>P. alchata</i>
Desert Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo ascalaphus</i>
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Bar-tailed Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes cincturus</i>
Desert Lark	<i>A. deserti</i>
Hoopoe Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>
Dupont's Lark	<i>Chersophilus duponti</i>
Thick-billed Lark	<i>Rhamphocoris clotbey</i>

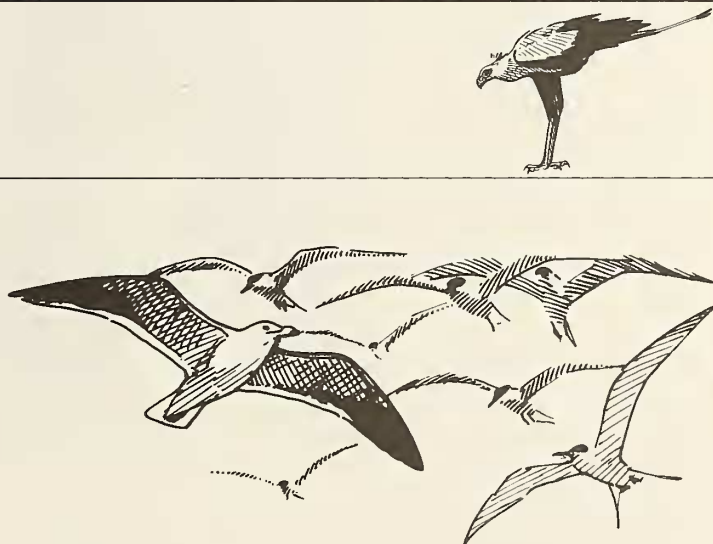
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>
Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella</i>
	<i>brachydactyla</i>
	<i>C. rufescens</i>
Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Crested Lark	<i>G. theklae</i>
Thekla Lark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Skylark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>
Shore Lark	<i>E. bilophia</i>
Temminck's Horned Lark	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
Tawny Pipit	<i>Phoenicurus moussieri</i>
Moussier's Redstart	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>O. oenanthe</i>
Wheatear	<i>O. deserti</i>
Desert Wheatear	<i>O. moesta</i>
Red-rumped Wheatear	<i>O. lugens</i>
Mourning Wheatear	
White-crowned	
Black Wheatear	<i>O. leucopygia</i>
Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>
Chough	<i>Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>
Raven	<i>C. corax</i>
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
Crimson-winged Finch	<i>Rhodopechys sanguinea</i>
Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>

Letters

Malindi Harbour, Kenya

In my paper on birding Arabuko-Sokoke and the north Kenya coast (*Bull ABC* 1(2): 79-89), I omitted to mention another accessible site which is well worth a visit, especially for people based or living in Malindi town. In recent years, Malindi harbour has provided some of Kenya's most tantalising rarities (like the only record of Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* in 1984) and, although the concentrations of shorebirds, gulls (*Laridae*) and terns (*Sternidae*) never compare to the flocks which build up at the mouth of the Sabaki River (some 7-8km to the north) or at Mida Creek (25km to the south), they are much more accessible, and certainly still worth a careful scan. Add the advantage of cafés scattered along the seafront (birds can easily be seen from several bars!) and it can make for some very enjoyable birding.

The best areas are along the shallow shore immediately in front of the main beach road, between Vasco de Gama point and the main jetty. Numerous birds



Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* and terns
By Mark Andrews

will congregate at low tide, and it is possible to watch from the roadside, the beach, or by wading further out in the shallow water (but look out for holes in the coral: it is dangerous to try wading in bare feet). Flocks congregate at the tide edge and further out towards and on the reef, as well as feeding throughout the

low-tide area. Many are within reach of binoculars, but a scope is definitely an asset.

When birding at Malindi, please remember the harbour is a public place and fishermen (and others) are entitled to be there, even if they sometimes disturb the flocks of birds you are watching! ☺

John H Fanshawe